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STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS AND  
IRAQI ELECTIONS

#### Summary

-- Lead story in all papers over the past two days,  
January 11-12, focus on the Palestinian presidential  
elections and the victory of Mahmoud Abbas for  
President.

#### Editorial Commentary

-- "Iraqi elections: the opportunity"

Columnist Rana Sabbagh writes on the op-ed page of  
independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad 901/12): "Hope  
remains that the IOM (International Organization for  
Migration), which is responsible for organizing the  
elections in places where Iraqis live outside of Iraq  
(14 Arab and foreign countries, including Jordan),  
will succeed in motivating and raising the awareness  
of Iraqis of the importance of exercising their  
constitutional right of voting. An extensive  
participation may just determine the beginning of the  
way out of the dark Iraqi tunnel, particularly with  
rising talk in the Congress, the Pentagon and the  
White House about the need to start thinking of a  
scenario for when and how to bring about the American  
disengagement from Iraq after the conclusion of the  
elections. Washington cannot continue to pay the cost  
of President George Bush's adventures for long. It is  
costing the U.S. treasury 4.5 billion dollars a month,  
plus the rising human cost and the escalation of the  
resistance, not to mention the restlessness of the  
American public vis--vis the gains acquired by the  
war."

-- "And there has become a partner for peace!!"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour  
(01/11) editorializes: "Finally, the Palestinians  
have a new president . and Israel no right to claim  
the presence of an 'obstacle' to resuming the  
political process, ending its occupation of the  
Palestinian territories, and establishing the  
Palestinian state.. The Palestinian people proved,  
through these elections, that they are capable of  
exercising democracy and express their will. They  
proved that they are people who can not only rule  
themselves and preserve their entity, but also  
overcome the biggest of crises and surpass the ordeal  
of losing their leader.. The only thing remaining now  
is to drag Israel to the negotiating table in order to  
start the countdown towards ridding the Palestinian  
brethren of one of the ugliest occupations in modern  
history."

-- "Fateh or Palestine?"

Daily columnist Basem Sakijha writes on the op-ed page  
of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour  
(01/11): "(Amidst all the celebrating) I thought that  
Mahmoud Abbas had defeated Ariel Sharon in the  
elections, or that the Likud party had lost to the  
Fateh Movement, or even that the Palestinian state was  
declared along with the initial results of the  
elections. The volume of Fateh's celebrations was  
larger than the event itself. Fateh men shooting  
their guns in the air was nothing more than childish..  
The celebrators forgot all about Palestinian democracy  
and magnified out of proportion a frail victory for a  
single organization.. We had hoped that celebrations  
would take place all over Palestine because of the  
victory for Palestinian democracy, as had been the  
case when the late Yaser Arafat was elected  
president.. Moreover, we heard not a word about the  
refugees, as if they have become heavy luggage lost  
along the long way. We heard not a word of  
condemnation for the Israeli enemy, as we had during  
the election campaign. In all cases, we witnessed the  
establishment of a single party in the great tradition

of the third world."

-- "A divider between two stages"

Daily columnist Urayb Rintawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (01/11): "Because the elections occurred in a climate of fair competition and transparency unprecedented in the Arab world, the pens of those harmed by the results of the these elections moved to question their legitimacy, emphasize their fabricated nature, and exaggerate the effect of the international support for Abu Mazen. Yet, the claims of these people are thwarted by the facts on the ground, which they choose to ignore by launching ready-made accusations. Instead of analyzing and discussing the significance of the prominent participation in the voting process and the meaning of the large percentage of votes that a man, known for his direct and clear stands, got in the elections, we see them talking about a terrible moment and a cosmic conspiracy, without which Abu Mazen would not have won. These people did not realize that the decision to boycott was not a popular decision. The Palestinian people are longing for freedom and democracy. These people did not realize that the Palestinian people have concerns and priorities, which may not necessarily be served by exaggerated slogans. These people did not realize that ballot boxes were the final arbitrator.. What was before the elections cannot be after the elections. The Palestinian people have cast their vote and they voted for Abu Mazen, the person, the movement, the program and the trend. No one, after January 9 has the right to veto.. It is time to speak the language of respect for the will and the choice of the people. Using the Palestinians of the Diaspora as an excuse to say that the elections reflected the will of just part of the Palestinians and not all of them lacks credibility, as though the Palestinians of the Diaspora are more influential and more popular than the Palestinians living in Palestine."

-- "Not an authorization to concede!"

Daily columnist Yaser Za'atreh writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (01/11): "What happened [Palestinian presidential elections] was a vote for the Fateh Movement in the absence of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and has absolutely nothing to do with Mahmoud Abbas or any other person running.. The game of forging the truth has started despite the fact that people know that victory was guaranteed for a man whom everyone on the Arab and international levels preferred. A large part of the Palestinian people could not reject him when the Authority's party had given him its legitimacy, when Hamas had been absent, and when they had heard the man talk about Palestinian principles and his readiness to hold a referendum on any final status solution of the Palestinian issue."

HALE